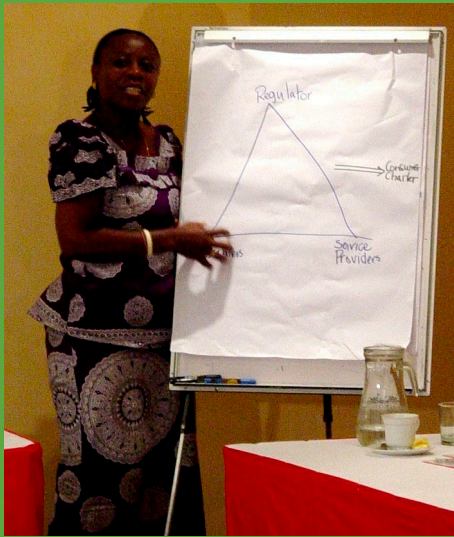




Zambia

Public Health and Safety Linked to Electricity Problems



Zambia Energy Regulatory Board public meeting.

Recently USAID, the Academy for Educational Development, the ERB, and the main utility company Zambia Electricity Supply Company (ZESCO), organized public meetings throughout the country to seek input on electricity concerns; to assess people's understanding of the rights and responsibilities of electricity consumers, suppliers and the ERB; and to educate and inform people of the ERB and its role in the electricity delivery process.

These public meetings are the first of their kind held with Zambia's electricity consumers and were carried out in every province. The information collected from these meetings will be incorporated into the development of an Electricity Charter – a public compact or pledge of trust and commitment between the regulator, utility and consumer to help address the electricity service

information gap that exists among the general public. Public consultation and open dialogue are critical for the development and public support of the Charter.

Zambia's Energy Regulatory Board (ERB), a quasi-governmental regulatory body, legislated in 1995 and established in 1997, has the mission of safeguarding the interests of energy consumers, promoting competition and private sector investment, helping to protect the environment and supporting sector policy goals. The ERB helps ensure that commercial energy companies earn a reasonable rate of return on their investments and consumers receive quality electricity service. USAID has been assisting the ERB with expanding its customer service capabilities and creating a public identity for protecting and promoting consumer rights in Zambia.

USAID and the ERB are using the inputs from the public meetings to craft the Electricity Charter, and USAID is helping the ERB develop a strategic communications plan and promotional campaign to launch the Charter. One way to use the Electricity Charter to improve public access to information will be to design Electricity Charter posters to be displayed in each of ZESCO's "pay point" offices throughout Zambia. Electricity customers register for new service, report service problems, and pay their bills at these pay point office, so these offices can serve as key information centers for electricity, health and other community news.

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